

**WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS INVENTORY
INVENTORY AREA EVALUATION (FORM 2)**

Current Conditions: Presence or Absence of Wilderness Characteristics

Area Unique Identifier: **Chukar Ridge**

Acreage: **29,056**

(If the inventory area consists of subunits, list the acreage of each and evaluate each separately).
In completing steps (1)-(5), use additional space as necessary.

(1) Is the area of sufficient size? (If the area meets one of the exceptions to the size criterion, check "Yes" and describe the exception in the space provided below),

YES

Description (describe the boundaries of the area--wilderness inventory roads, property lines, etc): **The Chukar Ridge LWC sits within the northwest portion of the Gabbs Valley Range. The area consists mostly of one large ridge stretching north/south, and it flanks on either side. To the west sits the Win Wan Valley, a large flat of alluvial fans and debris partially encompassed in the proposed area. To the east, hills fall more dramatically into the vast Gabbs Valley. The east side exhibits more topographic relief and the ridgeline is more rugged on this side, a tall rampart rising high along the skyline. The ridge itself is split into a northern and southern half by Wildhorse Canyon. This canyon also effectively splits the LWC, and each portion has a slightly different and unique character. The northern half is less tall but more rugged. Rock outcroppings and dramatic cliffs top the hills and canyons, but relatively little vegetation grows on these slopes. The far north portion of this area is dominated entirely by large washes and alluvial fans. This area drains to the large Nugent Wash and eventually all into the Gabbs Valley. In contrast, the southern half of this LWC rises much taller, and is covered in plentiful vegetation. Sitting at 7497 feet, the official Chukar Ridge peak is the highest point within this LWC. From here views stretch across the multiple canyons and craggy ridgelines of the southern half. These mountains are more typical of high desert, with abundant sagebrush and vegetation including Pinion Pines and Junipers. This area is certainly a scenic and beautiful part of the desert.**

Boundaries of this area follow multiple roads and several developments including power lines and utilities. In general, this LWC is easily bounded in a straightforward and logical fashion. Starting from the Northwest portion of this area, the suggested boundary follows a large power line and its associated utility road. This line heads north and crosses the large Nugent Wash. From this point the logical northern boundary follows the Nugent Wash Road, a graded 2 lane dirt route, to the east towards the Gabbs Valley. After about a mile, the advised boundary splits to the south onto less major routes. It is suggested that the boundary initially follow the most major of these routes, a wash with moderate traffic leading towards the Nevada Rand Mine. Another possible boundary was evaluated to the Southwest of this route, consisting of an old mining exploration route and some bulldozer scrapes. This route is very rough and mostly renaturalized, therefore it is suggested for closure and not as a proposed boundary. Heading towards the Nevada Rand Mine, the northern boundary becomes more complicated. The route diverges eastward, while a proposed boundary continues southeast up the wash. This is a logical boundary choice, as it excludes excessive mining and exploration work from the proposed LWC area. This wash snakes to the east, south of the Nevada Rand Mine and south of all past development and use. While the

main road travels through several historic mining areas and much development, the suggested boundary follows a path just to the south. This route crosses the ridge and cuts southeast across the face of the hills. Having the boundary oriented as such excludes the Golden Pen Mine, the Blue Sphinx Mine, and other mining work from the LWC. This is a very effective and logical boundary, and leaves vehicle access open to these historic mining areas. The boundary rejoins a vehicle route on the access road to the Blue Sphinx Mine. From there it heads east down into the Gabbs Valley.

At the intersection of the Blue Sphinx Mine Road and the Rabbit Spring Road, the proposed boundary heads south. The Rabbit Spring Road provides an excellent boundary route for many miles, and also provides a boundary for the Gabbs Valley Range WSA to the east. Near the Southeast corner of this LWC, the suggested boundary cuts west and follows a power line which diverges from the Rabbit Spring Road. This power line cuts south, eventually crossing a major arterial road in the Win Wan Flat. The proposed boundary follows this road, which makes an effective and logical southern border. This road continues on a northwest track, until eventually meeting the western boundary, a large power line as described above.



Chukar Ridge 2013

Will Boyer

There are several major routes which cut into this area and would be suggested for possible cherry stems. The most major of these routes crosses the LWC through Wildhorse Canyon. Although the route through Wildhorse Canyon is continuous, it is very rough and partial closure is recommended. However, one large mining exploration route cuts south from the canyon bottom and makes a large switch backing cut up the hillside. This route eventually ends high on a ridge at several old drill pads with spectacular camping and views. Due to the incredibly constructed nature of this route, and its lack of reclamation, a cherry stem is suggested from the east side of Wildhorse Canyon. There is another area of excessive mining exploration north of the Wildhorse Canyon Route, and just west of the previously mentioned cut. This area could also be cherry stemmed from the east, but it has no access from Wildhorse Canyon due to washout. If left to natural devices, this area will reclaim itself in a relatively short amount of time.

Finally, there is a large cut leading up and out of Wildhorse Canyon on its western side. This cut creates a thoroughfare through the canyon, but is in bad condition. It is suggested that this route be closed and reclaimed from its western origin. Along the southern border is another mining exploration route leading into the hills and with several old bulldozer scrapes and tracks. A cherry stem of this route is also suggested, originating from the Win Wan Flat. Although this route has no modern context, it does provide access to nice camping and has seen extensive past development. No other major cherry stems are suggested for this LWC. (See Appendix: C Route Analysis for more details on these routes.)

(2) Does the area appear to be natural?

YES

Note: If “No” is checked the area does not have wilderness characteristics; check “NA” for the remaining questions below.

Description (include land ownership, location, topography, vegetation, and summary of major human uses/activities):

The Chukar Ridge LWC is an incredible natural area with minimal development around its edges. Rocky ridgelines and large washes in the north give way to taller hills and deeper canyons in the south. Overall the terrain is rugged and spectacular, dominated by natural forces including rockfall, flashfloods, and wind erosion. Several historic routes throughout the area give evidence to this, as they are impassable and highly re-naturalized from such events. The northern portion of this LWC is incredibly stark and arid, with little vegetation providing cover. Hearty saltbush is apparent throughout, clinging to the steep hillsides and adding a grey sheen to the land. Due to the lack of water north of Wildhorse Canyon, the vegetation is less varied, and geology is more interesting. This portion of the LWC has a seemingly Martian or otherworldly feel, typical of such low desert environs. South of Wildhorse Canyon, elevations increase and the area is slightly lush. Several springs provide water, and the vegetation has more variety. Pinion Pines and Junipers cover the hills, and sagebrush makes an appearance. Some of the canyons also contain bitterbrush, greasewood, and other varieties of desert plants. The landscape takes on a more colorful appearance, and life seems to flourish in comparison to the barren north. This area is excellent habitat for bighorn sheep, pronghorn, and the occasional mule deer. Large predators

also certainly lurk the area, and smaller desert animals are apparent as well. Numerous birds also find nests and roosts in the cliffs and rocks as well as in the abundant shrubbery. This area is alive with natural forces and wildlife.

North of Wildhorse Canyon there is little development within this LWC. Due to the northern boundary's orientation as previously mentioned, much historic mining and exploration work has been omitted from the lands. Exceptions include minor scrapes and bulldozer work south of Nugent Wash, and similar work in the flats of the Win Wan Valley. These two locations are mostly re-vegetated and hardly recognizable. Their closure to further use or vehicle traffic is recommended. In addition, as previously mentioned, remnants of exploration work sit just north of the Wildhorse Canyon Route. This area could be cherry stemmed, but its closure and inclusion into the LWC is advised. Natural forces and very steep slopes are working well to - and limit access to this disturbance. There is also some leftover trash and historic debris located north of the Wildhorse Canyon Route, near the Rabbit Springs Road. Finally, there is one recreational driving route that enters the area from the northern boundary. Closure of this route is also recommended.

South of Wildhorse Canyon, the area has several long intrusions and has also seen past mining exploration work. The most major of these has been previously mentioned and heads south from Wildhorse Canyon. A cherry stem of this route is recommended. Other development within Wildhorse Canyon includes a bighorn sheep guzzler, and several faint routes heading south into the hills. These routes could be easily closed, and appear to mostly see recreational use. Along the Win Wan Valley, several similar routes exist, and their closure would also be suggested. The exception is one longer route which leads to un-reclaimed mining exploration and another bighorn sheep guzzler. As previously mentioned, a cherry stem of this route is also recommended. Along the eastern boundary, there are several intrusions from the Rabbit Spring Road. The most extensive of these routes is also the most southern, and leads to reclaimed mining exploration. Its closure would be advised. Other routes from the Rabbit Spring Road, see low use and would also be recommended for closure. They lead to springs, mining exploration (both reclaimed and not), and to several campsites. The exception is one short route north of Gillis Spring. This route leads to a historic cow camp, and modern day hunting cabin. This cabin sees frequent use and visitation, and a cherry stem to this structure would be sensible. Closure of the route past this camp is recommended. Although the southern area has many intruding routes, most are short in length and do not affect the overall naturalness of this LWC.



Chukar Ridge 2013

Will Boyer

(3) Does the area (or the remainder of the area if a portion has been excluded due to unnaturalness and the remainder is of sufficient size) have outstanding opportunities for solitude?

YES

Description (describe the area's outstanding opportunities for solitude): **Outstanding opportunities for solitude are quite plentiful within the Chukar Ridge LWC. During time spent in this area, the inventory crew met no other human beings. Although it is apparent that this area has seen past use, it sees little visitation modernly. The exception to this is along the northern boundary, where historical mining and interesting structures are quite abundant. Regardless, these sit outside the LWC, and visitation into the core of this unit is quite rare. This is a vast and desolate desert landscape, where the incredible expanse alone shields those who enter. Furthermore, deep canyons and rugged landscape provide an environment where many may enter and each one would find deep isolation and outstanding opportunities for solitude. In these lands one gets a sense that nature is in control, and humanity is distant. There is little sound but the wind through the ridges and the occasional call of a wild animal. The modern world and cares of society seem an eon away, and one feels truly alone. It would be hard to achieve a greater sense of solitude.**

(4) Does the area (or the remainder of the area if a portion has been excluded due to unnaturalness and the remainder is of sufficient size) have outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation?

YES

Description (describe the area's outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation):

The Chukar Ridge LWC provides outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation. Extensive canyons, tall hills, and vast terrain provides destinations for hiking and backpacking. Several tall peaks and hills also provide challenge for peak baggers and those wishing to summit. Views from the ridge are majestic and stretch far in all directions. Craggs and numerous outcrops of firm rhyolite and other volcanic rock give opportunities for rock climbing and bouldering. The interesting rock formations provided outstanding features for photography and less advanced rock scrambling. Throughout the area, abundant wildlife exists for hunting and viewing. Throughout the area exists the opportunity to capture portraits of elusive wild plants, wildlife, or colorful and enigmatic rock formations. The rugged rhyolitic terrain presents a challenge for any experienced equestrian and burro packing could help a visitor make a living connection with the challenges faced by the early Nevada miners in this region. Nighttime brings outstanding opportunities for star gazing in this dark corner of Nevada. This area seems to have a high population of bighorn sheep, a rare large animal. During time spent in the LWC, the inventory crew even caught a glimpse of this majestic animal. The colorful and varied geology of the area provides many wonders for people who enjoy rockhounding. For the artist, the Chukar area offers opportunities for inspiration, sketching, and painting. This area presents visitors with outstanding possibilities to challenging themselves with primitive and unconfined recreation and a variety of many options for outstanding recreation.



Chuckar Ridge 2013

Will Boyer

(5) Does the area have supplemental values (ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic or historical value)?

YES

Description:

This area has historical significance with mining and mineral resources. Although mineral claims have been dismissed, it has been looked at in the past by prospectors and has seen some occupation by humans. Significant historical sites exist along the northern boundary including the Nevada Rand Mine, the Golden Pen Mine, and the Blue Sphinx Mine. Some large historical structures are still intact and remain standing to this day. In these locations, one can almost sense the presence of past humans, and feel the spirits in an echoing and ghostly fashion.

In addition, this area could provide some habitat for the Sage Grouse. Several springs and extensive sage hills in the south provide the right ingredients for this bird. Although grouse were not seen within the LWC, it is more than likely that they find shelter and home within these mountains.

The Chukar Ridge LWC is an interesting and unique portion of Great Basin Desert. Interesting geology and scenery combine with abundant wildlife and a variety of different habitats and climates, which can serve as an invaluable study area for climate change. With two distinctly different portions, the area provides ample room for much exploration. In addition, the region sees little human traffic and much past development is re-naturalizing with no extra help. This area is rich in both historic and natural value. Further action to preserve this LWC is strongly recommended.



Chukar Ridge 2013

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